

Méttraux—Ethnology of Easter Island

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All traditions of the seclusion of children rest on an authentic custom, the memory of which has not been entirely lost. Both De Langle (130, vol. 1, p. 81) and members of Gonzalez' expedition (90, p. 40) mention having seen huts where children were apparently secluded, guarded by adults.

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FEAST HOUSE

A large house (*hare nui*) was built before a feast (*koro*) where young people gathered to play and sing. They lived in more or less promiscuity, and tradition says that they had many opportunities to make love and to have sexual intercourse. Foundations were laid for many marriages during the feast, but as evidenced by numerous tales, the feast houses were not for the young people only but for all invited guests. Routledge was told that the young people who shared in the dances had to be "white" (*ritorito*) which in Easter Island is almost synonymous with "fine." Routledge (194, p. 235) writes: "In connection with some or all of the *kaunga* (dancing grounds) there was a house where the party remained indoors for a long time previous to the dances, in order 'to get their complexions,' a touch which shows that a white skin was admired." In traditional records of *koro* some confusion may have arisen between the seclusion before the feast and the actual *koro*.

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INITIATION RITES

When the children between the ages of 13 and 15 years were submitted to seclusion, rites were celebrated which had perhaps the character of a consecration. Little is known about these ceremonies, and their significance is obscure. The boys and girls who went through the ceremonies were termed *poki take* and *poki manu* (bird children). Routledge (194, p. 266) was told that the *take* ceremonies were dropped about 30 years before the arrival of the missionaries and that no living person had attended such a ceremony. The oldest man in the village when Routledge was there stated that the *take* ceremony was intended for adults and that the father performed the rites when the son was born. My information was obtained from Viriamo through Tepano. She said that boys and girls were sent to Motu-nui when they were 13 years of age. They sojourned on the island for three months, living in separate caves. Food was taken to them in canoes, and ornaments (*tahonga*, wooden balls) and special breechcloths of tapa called *hami mama* were sent them by their parents. The children were given red and white ocher (*kia* and *marikuru*) for the painting of their bodies. White bands were painted around the arms and feet, concentric white circles on the back at the level of the waist, and two white rings on the buttocks.

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The ceremony following seclusion was called *te manu mo ta poki* (the bird for the child). I could discover no better explanation of this feast and its benefit than that given by Routledge, which is vague and probably incor-

- 881 rect: "... a child whose parents had not performed the ceremony, and whose love affairs, for instance, went wrong, might even kill his father in revenge for the omission." The boy had his head shaved, and he presented an egg to a man called *tangata tapu manu*, who was told the child's name, in order to insert it in the ritual. Each boy went to Orongo in company with a *tangata tapu manu*. A man who had been a *poki manu* (child for whom the ceremony had been performed) told Routledge that when he went to Orongo with nine other children, they had taken ten chickens with them. Routledge writes (194, p. 267):

The party danced in front of all the houses, went to the carved rocks at the end, and, coming back, stood in a semicircle in front of the door of Taura-renga, the house of the statue, the experts being behind and all singing; no offering was made to the images. Another authority stated that the parents and children went on the roof of the house, the experts being below, and the parents gave chickens to the men. Jotefa's party returned to their home, had a feast, and gave more food to the professionals. The *tangata-manu* subsequently repeated the ritual at any *koro* which were being held on the island, the object apparently being to make public the child's initiation.

- 881 Quite different was the ceremony for girls. After they had dressed and decorated themselves as well as they could, they went to Orongo where their
831 parents awaited them. There they were entrusted to five men called *matangarahū* (eye-paint). Each girl stood up on a rock called Papa-rōna, with legs spread open, and two men below examined her vulva. If it was small (*tekeleke*), they announced the fact in a loud voice. Then they carved the rock with an image of the vulva. This tradition is probably an attempt to explain the various representations of the vulva carved on a rock at Orongo.

- 881 More nearly correct is the reference to a special feast celebrated for the girl, who gave chickens to her brothers and cousins. At the ceremonies some reverence was paid to the image Taura-renga in Orongo. Viriamo explained to Routledge (194, p. 267) that she was a *poki manu* and was taken with her three sisters to the ahu Orohie. Both parents went and "... the mother took two chickens, one in each hand, and the mother and children stood upright and the 'maori sang'; they did not go to Orongo because there was war."

PUBERTY

- 146 According to Dr. Drapkin, puberty begins for girls at the age of 10 and
864 is completed at 12. The critical age for boys is between 12 and 14. However, the sexual life of children begins long before they have reached puberty; at 6 or 7 years they indulge in sexual contacts, which are taken as a matter of course. They try to imitate what they have seen among the older children or adults. Sexual instincts develop rapidly and quite unrestrainedly. Girls
836 and boys under 10 years of age have sexual intercourse, and many girls of about that age have been violated by grown men. Very young girls often

PETROGLYPHS

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The petroglyphs on the rocks at the end of the village of Orongo were the first to be studied in detail and reproduced in drawings and photographs (pl. 7, *c*). The basalt rocks that overhang the sea east of the village are covered with carvings in high relief that have been made at different periods. Some are entirely worn down while others are fairly well preserved. The most easterly houses of the village have been built upon carvings, thus giving good evidence that some of the petroglyphs are older than parts of the village.

Most of the petroglyphs represent the fantastic bird-man with the head of a frigate bird, recognizable by its curved beak and pouch, and a human body in a crouching position. With one exception these images are in profile. One is combined with a feather-like appendage. Three carvings show the bird-man holding an egg (fig. 45, *a*). Four small carvings of birds, mentioned by Routledge (194, p. 448), are outlined in the usual style and are real masterpieces of graphic art. The head of one of the bird-men is merged with the face of the big-eyed god, a common motif of the Easter Island petroglyphs (134, p. 212). The big-eyed face was carved first and then transformed into a bird-man. We recorded several other occurrences of the big-eyed face. The bird-man motif occurs about 120 times among the petroglyphs of Orongo. The figure is outlined by pecking the surface around the design so that it stands in relief.

A common design at Orongo, especially on a flat rock overhanging the cliffs, is the conventionalized representation of the vulva. This figure is tradi-

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connected with puberty rites.



FIGURE 45.—Petroglyphs: *a*, bird-man carved in low relief with egg in hand, 36.5 cm. long (after Routledge, 194, fig. 112); *b-c*, big-eyed figures in Hen cave (from Lavachery, 134, p. 109).

PRESENT-DAY EASTER ISLANDERS

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scribed by Jorge as follows: The father is the head (*mayer*) of the family while the first born son is the head of the children, thus the father and the first born son must stand in special relationship to one another and to the total family. 593
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ADOLESCENCE

There are no formal puberty rites existing on the island today, but the period at which a boy is said to become a man is reasonably well fixed in the minds of the people. According to Jorge and Roberto, in earlier days a boy did not become a man, nor did he do a man's work, until he reached the age of twenty, his time being occupied until then in play and fun. Today, however, most native children go to the Chilean-run school from the ages of nine until twelve, after which the boys, at least, are expected to start doing some work. Thus, when Juan Atan's wife became ill and he was unable to come to work, he sent his thirteen year old son to take his place. Although doing a full day's work at a man's job, this youth was consistently referred to as a *poki*, or boy. Some indication of when he would be regarded as a man was presented on the job one day. My workmen caught the boy examining one of the many pictographs at Orongo called *komari*, which stylistically depict a vulva. The men immediately began to joke him terrifically, and during the joking Jorge turned to me and remarked, "He will be ready for that in another two years." From this, it would appear that fifteen years of age may be taken as the approximate age for a young man to enter into mature sex relations and, in general, become a man. 884
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Further evidence along this line was brought forward during a discussion of who could, or could not, vote in the election of the three natives who stand as representatives of the people before the governor of the island. Among the natives there was no fixed age at which a person could vote, the consistent theme being that one could vote when one became a man. Asked if the Atan youth could vote, they informed me that he could not as he was still a *poki*. It was only after considerable questioning and discussion that my workers came to the conclusion that a person of approximately fifteen or sixteen years of age had reached the age of manhood and had the right to vote. An approximately similar age for womanhood appears to hold for girls, as well. At least a search of the government population records showed the earliest age for the marriage of girls was fifteen. 884
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COURTING

Unmarried girls from about fourteen or fifteen onward are given complete sexual freedom which does not begin and end with a possible suitor but is maintained with any passing boy friend. Such relationships are taken quite as casually 836

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PRE-CHRISTIAN CULTURE

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177 met with an almost embarrassing response, eighty-six being quoted straight away; some of these may be the official names of bird-men and not represent a year, but they probably do so in most cases; chronological sequence was achieved with fair certainty for eleven years prior to the final celebration at Orongo. In addition to the bird-name, the names of both winner and hopu were ascertained, with those of their respective clans.

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FIG. 113.

Porotu acted as a hopu. He refused to be photographed, and the sketch was surreptitiously made.



whilst obtaining the account of his official experiences. He also assisted in carrying the remains of Ko Tori (p. 225).

TAKÉ AND MANU

881 Two other ceremonies were mentioned in connection with Orongo and Motu Nui, but to obtain detailed information was very difficult. It finally transpired that of "také" no first-hand knowledge existed, as the rites had been abandoned thirty years before the coming of the missionaries. All that can be safely said is that those concerned went into retreat on Motu Nui, living, it was stated, in the cave where the hopu awaited the birds; the period was generally given as three months. A vigorous discussion took place on the subject between Viriamo and Jotefa, the oldest man in the village, seated on a log in the garden of the old lady. She was positive, in agreement with other authorities, that také was for children—"the boys and girls went in a canoe to the island"; he firmly adhered to the statement that his father went for také, after he, the son, was born. Tomenika stated that

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15:Routledge E-5 (1914-1915) 1919
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FIG. 114.

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BIRD-CHILD (POKI-MANI).

Ceremonial ornamentation, from a drawing made by natives.

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[pacing p. 267]

THE BIRD CULT

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také formed the subject of one of the tablets, and drew one of its figures, which bears no resemblance to any other known symbol.

The details of manu were more satisfactory. It was known as "te manu mo te poki," or, "the bird for the child," and the child so initiated became a "poki-manu," or "bird-child." It could not be found that any special benefit resulted from it, but a child whose parents had not performed the ceremony, and whose love affairs, for instance, went wrong, might even kill his father in revenge for the omission. An expert, known as "tangata-tapa-manu," (the man who, as Dr. Marett would tell us, "knew the right things to say," was called in and given a hen's egg—on this last point much stress was laid; he was at the same time told the child's name, which was subsequently inserted in the ritual. The child was shaved, decorated with white bands, and hung round with coconuts, or, as these were not readily obtainable in Easter Island, with pieces of wood carved to represent them called "tahonga." A number of children, each with an expert, then went up to Orongo; the correct month was December, and the Ao were therefore below at Mataveri. Jotefa, on whose final account I principally rely, stated that he and nine other children, with their parents, and ten tangata-tapa-manu, went to Orongo from his home on the north coast, a distance of some eleven miles; they took with them ten chickens. The party danced in front of all the houses, went to the carved rocks at the end, and, coming back, stood in a semicircle in front of the door of Taura-renga, the house of the statue, the experts being behind and all singing; no offering was made to the image. Another authority stated that the parents and children went on the roof of the house, the experts being below, and the parents gave chickens to the men. Jotefa's party returned to their home, had a feast, and gave more food to the professionals. The tangata-tapa-manu subsequently repeated the ritual at any koro which were being held in the island, the object apparently being to make public the child's initiation.

If, by reason of the state of the island, it was not possible to go to Orongo, the ceremony could take place at any of the big ahu with images. Viriamo, whose home, as will be remembered, was near Raraku, said with much pride that she was a "poki-manu"; she and her three younger sisters had been taken at the same time to the ahu of Orohié. Both parents

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- 881 went, and "the mother took two chickens, one in each hand, and the mother and children stood upright and the "maori sang"; they did not go to Orongo because there was war. A drawing was made for us by Juan and the old men of the poki-manu in ceremonial attire (fig. 114); it was particularly interesting to
 [302] find, when it was handed in, that circles of white pigment were made on the child's back, and also on each buttock, in a way which recalls the adornment of the Anakena image (fig. 65).

WOODEN CARVINGS

- 532 The stone sculpture of Easter Island belongs to an era which is now forgotten; there are a number of wooden carvings which,
 322 whatever their original age, are connected with a recent past, and even in a limited sense with the present.

- The most important of these works, the tablets, have already been dealt with, and mention has been made of the lizard figures, they have the head of that animal on a human body (fig. 117). The "ao," the large dancing-paddle, and the smaller one, the "rapa," are of much the same character, though used on different occasions (figs. 116 (a), 118). The "ua" is a club, on the handle of which are two heads back to back; these clubs were dignified with individual names. The "paoa" was a wooden sword. There were also
 301 bird ornaments carved in wood which were worn on the last
 322 day of the koro and by Ngaara. The "rei-miro" is a breast
 532 ornament of a crescent shape, with a face at one or both ends; it is found depicted on the Orongo rocks and frequently on the tablets. It was especially a woman's decoration, but a number of small ones were said to have been worn by Ngaara. The specimen in the British Museum is embellished with glyphs, of which no account was forthcoming (fig. 115).

- 322 Wooden objects which are peculiarly interesting are the small male and female figures some twenty to thirty inches
 532 in height; the natives term them "moai," adding the word "miro," or wood (fig. 119). In a certain number of these the ribs are very prominent, giving the effect of emaciation; they are called "moai kava-kava," or the statues with ribs. It has been
 [173] suggested that this represents the condition in which the first inhabitants reached the island, but such an explanation is